

Department of Agriculture wordbinders have changed the name of the Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service to the Rural Environment Assistance Program. The idea is to shift the cost-share program to a drumbeat that follows the thinking of the new ecology trend. Official goals haven't been revealed, but speculation is that the program will be directed toward range and farm practices that will improve the surroundings in agriculture communities.

Included also in the renaming of the service was a reduction in appropriations. The Agriculture Department, I suppose figured that morning-glories and hollyhocks could be planted cheaper than brush could be controlled or terraces could be built. I imagine too that the department has been watching us get by on less income every year and decided that they might as well cut their handouts accordingly.

Starting a beatification program on a short cash basis is a ridiculous way to begin. Being broke is what makes things ugly. Environmentalist ought to know that the most unsightly part of the cities are the slums. Street scenes can't be pretty as long as you have a bunch of broke people standing around looking glum, leaning against unpainted lamp posts. Tenant houses cloistered against Mt. Everest would spoil the scenery. Until the poverty stricken develop a sense of humor, they are going to be a deadweight to any city. If they can't appear to be happy, the least they could do would be congregate in the alleys or move out on a ranch where impoverished conditions are more dignified and less apparent to the rest of the world.

As much money as the Department of Agriculture has spent, they shouldn't have to be told that money will touch up nearly any phase of man's existence. Why, you can take one of these wind-blistered Shortgrassers and make him look dressy in a \$100 hat. But you can't get him a screen test wearing a piece of bargain felt that the beavers would claim came from a ground squirrel's pelt.

Boiled beans and salt pork would take on a holiday air underneath the shadows of a champagne bottle reflecting the light of a colored candle. Patched blue jeans aren't near so shabby when they're decorated by a fat check book in the hip pocket. And it's true the world over; rich widows have a charm that can bring a magician under their spell. French perfume makers have never been able to capture an odor that will beat the aroma of big stacks of bills.

Money is synonymous with beauty. Yellowstone park wouldn't be a tourist attraction on a rancher or farmer's budget. Old faithful wouldn't be much more than a carbonated hot spring if it's upkeep had to come from the income off cattle or row crops. The first time the bank heard about all that hot water being spewed into the air, the old geyser would have to be choked down until its veins were ruptured underneath the ground. Jugkeepers wouldn't stand for geyser expense money as fast as they would a membership card in a Playboy Club. It's a great break for the country that Yellowstone is public domain.

There's no denying that the Shortgrass Country doesn't need an environmental overhaul job. Dust has been passing through at the rate of 5000 acre feet per day for the past two weeks. San Angelo weathermen have been so addled by the high west winds that they still give small craft warnings for lakes that went dry last summer. Life is going on, but it's moving at a mighty grim pace.

Building one big windbreak would be a big step toward improving our environment. But I'm not hopeful as long as the government is going to chinchy with the money. I don't know why they use the word "assistance" in the title if they are going to be cheap about the program. We've already proved that you can't do anything about the country unless you have the coin to back it up.